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SUBJECT: TURKEY: LEFT-LEANING OPPOSITION SHOWING SOME SIGNS
OF LIFE

REF: ANKARA 149

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner for reasons 1.4(b),
(d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: In the past two weeks, Turkey's long-moribund, inchoate left has begun to show signs it may coalesce into a pre-election alliance. While there are significant hurdles to overcome -- in particular, who should head the formation -- they evince a new resolve to get in the game before the general elections scheduled for November 4. Even if they succeed, they will still face the uphill challenge of luring the 10 percent of the national vote needed to enter parliament. With the current ostensibly center-left Republic People's Party (CHP) having opted for geriatric nationalist populism, there is an opening on the political left, both for a party and for fresh ideas. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) A cluster of small entities on Turkey's political left appear to be engaged in a rapprochement aimed at organizing a pre-election political alliance. In previous elections, parties with little hope of surmounting Turkey's 10 percent parliamentary threshold have united to cross the barrier, then gone their separate ways once in parliament. The fractious opposition has been in disarray since the 2002 election, which resulted in only two parties (representing about half the voters) crossing the threshold. Various constellations of parties on the left, parties on the right, and combinations thereof, have been explored in the past year, but so far leaders' egos have blocked compromise. Now, with the presidential election at hand and parliamentary election campaigns about to shift into full swing, the vacuum on the left is bringing urgency to the discussions. Embassy contacts are optimistic -- and increasingly specific -- that a leftist alliance may soon be born.

13. (C) The core of this alignment embraces the Democratic Left Party (DSP), the Social Democratic People's Party (SHP), the "10 December" group, and DISK trade union. In addition, former minister Sadeddin Tantan's Yurt Partisi (YP) may consider joining, as may Mehmet Ali Bayar. The constellation will exclude the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP); the SHP has learned from bitter experience that the supporters of each party reject such an alliance. An alliance with Erkan Mumcu's center-right Anavatan, which currently holds 20 seats in parliament, is also reportedly "out of the question," according to leftist intellectual leader Uluc Gurkan. Anavatan may be on the brink of losing parliamentary group status, if -- as Gurkan predicts -- three or four current Anavatan MPs defect to the new constellation.

¶4. (C) As so often in Turkish politics, leadership may prove the alliance's deal-breaker. Istanbul's ambitious Sisli mayor (and erstwhile pretender to the CHP throne) Mustafa Sarigul reportedly aspires to lead the alliance, but DSP leader Zeki Sezer allegedly would not accept him. Zeki Sezer himself lacks the charisma and muscle to head the union (ref A), although he would undoubtedly want the job. Former FM Hikmet Cetin may stand the greatest chance of success, but it is not clear he wants to re-enter politics, and Ahmet Abakay, SHP press advisor, cautions that many Kurds see him as a traitor.

¶5. (C) The as-yet nonexistent alliance also doesn't have a platform, but contacts claim that leftists have expanded their horizons from unions and workers' rights to embrace poverty and income disparity, environmental issues, and women's issues. This election year, even on the left, how Turkey's national interest is defined will dominate, as will the concept of national unity. Gurkan warns that the US can expect the left alliance to take a strongly critical position toward the US on the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Abakay believes corruption will also be a major focus.

¶6. (C) COMMENT. The success of such an alliance -- first its creation, then its electoral result -- is by no means guaranteed. It is one of several rumored to be under discussion. Apart from finding the right figure to bind the alliance together, it faces the reality of the political market: CHP leader Baykal is threatening to try to buy off the alliance's top names with good slots on CHP's own party list. The left is keenly aware of its own voters' role in

ANKARA 00000652 002 OF 002

low 2002 turnout and hopes to entice them back to the polls. As CHP has all but vacated the left in favor of nationalist populism, there is a vacuum in the political spectrum waiting to be filled. END COMMENT.

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